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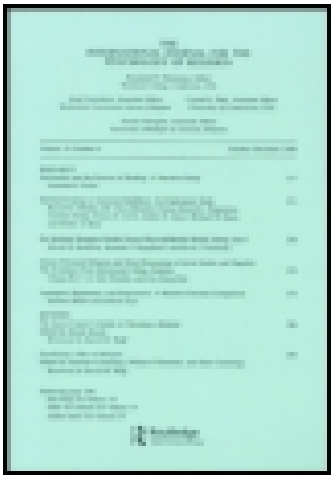

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Wallace E. Northover & Luis Montoro Gonzalez

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RESEARCH REPORT

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Religious Belief: Canadian and Spanish Students' Responses to the Hunt Scale

Wallace E. Northover
Psychology Department
York University

Luis Montoro Gonzalez
Psychology Department
University of Valencia

In a cross-cultural study of religious belief, the responses of 254 students from the University of Valencia were compared with those of 214 students from York University. It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between the Spanish and Canadian samples and that the differences would be greater between cultures than between the two denominations (Catholic and Protestant) that made up the Canadian sample. In their responses to the Hunt Scale, Spanish students were found to be significantly ($p < .001$) less "literal" and more "antireligious" than Canadian students (Protestant or Catholic). We explain our findings by contrasting the different functions of religion within the two cultures.

Belief systems are known to be subject to social influence in the same way as are attitudes and opinions (Brown, 1966; Rokeach, 1970). As a consequence, some authors doubt that the supposed "broad consensus" within

Requests for reprints should be sent to Wallace E. Northover, Associate Professor of Psychology, Atkinson College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario, CANADA M3J-1P3.

major religious denominations really exists (Crysdale, 1965). For instance, some time ago it was found that religious belief, at least as measured by the Hunt Scale, was very much influenced by socioeconomic class (Northover, 1972a). When a sample of the Roman Catholic population of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, was broken down into subgroups based on social class, each exhibited significantly different belief patterns. In fact, when social class was held constant, and Catholic responses were compared with those of Protestants (principally, Anglican and United Church), there were fewer differences between the denominations than between the social classes represented. That researcher speculated that perhaps there was less intrafaith homogeneity than one might suspect and that religious belief was open to many other influences besides social class, such as culture (Northover, 1974).

He then became aware of a survey of the attitudes and beliefs of Spanish Catholic youth (Peiro, Del Barrio, & Carpintero, 1983), which included items related to religious belief but yielded responses radically different from those obtained in a similar Canadian survey conducted much earlier (Northover, 1972a). Were the more liberal or "radical" responses of Spanish subjects simply due to the passage of time or do they represent reactions to cultural situations? The authors of the Spanish study argued that Spain is experiencing fundamental "social system change," resulting in a peculiar interrelation between the religious and political sides of society.

If, as those authors suggested, Spain is moving toward a type of (if not a de facto) separation of Church and State, has this movement influenced religious belief? Would the separation have a more radicalizing effect in Spain than it has had in the pluralistic environment of North America? To answer these questions, and to ascertain the influence of culture on religious belief, a joint study was proposed involving cooperation between the University of Valencia (Spain) and York University (Toronto, Canada).

THE HUNT SCALE

The Hunt Scale was employed because it taps traditional beliefs in a way that permits participants to indicate a reason for their acceptance or rejection of specific doctrines (Hunt, 1972). These interpretations fall into three categories: (a) literal (an unquestioning acceptance of the traditional doctrine without qualification), (b) antireligious (a rejection of the belief in its entirety), and (c) mythological or symbolic (as an acceptance that involves some qualification or interpretation of the doctrine). For example: Item #2 of the scale:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

1. Agree, since available evidence proves that God made everything. ("literal")

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2. Disagree, since available evidence suggests some type of spontaneous creation for which it is unnecessary to assume a God to create. ("Anti-religious")
3. Agree, but only in the sense that this is an anthropomorphic way of talking about whatever Process, or Ultimate Concern stands behind this creative process. ("symbolic" or "mythological")

HYPOTHESIS

If it is the case that religious beliefs (as measured by responses to the Hunt Scale) are more influenced by culture than religion, we would expect greater differences between Spaniards and Canadians than between Canadian Catholics and Canadian Protestants. Thus, although the Canadian sample is made up of Roman Catholics and other Christian denominations, we hypothesized that the differences would be greater between cultures than between the two Canadian groups.

SUBJECTS

Subjects were selected from the University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain, and York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Both are of comparable size (approximately 30,000 students) and situated in one of the largest cities in their respective countries. In both places students are, largely, middle-class. They were all born in their respective countries, and were first-year, full-time students, enrolled in Introductory Psychology. They were matched, as much as was possible, with respect to age. A breakdown of the two samples by sex and denomination is presented in Table 1.

With regard to the Canadian sample, 85.0% were between 19 and 21 years of age. That figure for the Spanish sample was 90.9%. Slightly more were over 21 years of age in the Canadian sample (13.5%) than in the Spanish sample (7.5%). The reason for this is that York students take Introductory Psychology in either first or second year, whereas University of Valencia students must take it in first year.

TABLE 1
Frequency Distribution by Country, Sex, and Denomination

			Canadian					
	Spanish		*Catholic*		*Protestant*		*Total*	
Sex	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Male	53	20.9%	35	28.2%	22	24.4%	57	26.6%
Female	201	79.1%	89	71.8%	68	75.6%	157	73.3%
Total	254		124		90		214	

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It must be noted that the majority of subjects in the samples were female: 73.3% of the Canadian sample and 79.1% of Spanish sample. This is a feature of psychology students at both universities. Thus, although unbalanced, it tends to reflect accurately the populations of the two universities.

It must also be noted that the two samples were not matched for religion. This was a function of York University's regulations governing the use of human subjects. Those regulations prohibit forcing a student to identify his or her religion publicly, and so a researcher cannot say "This questionnaire is for Roman Catholics only. All others please leave the room." One can, however, request students to identify their religion voluntarily on an anonymous questionnaire. For this reason, the Hunt Scale was administered to introductory courses until the Canadian Roman Catholic sample was large enough to permit comparisons. Because other religions were included in the Canadian sample, comparisons of Canadian non-Catholic Christians with Spanish Catholics were possible. Spanish subjects identified themselves as Roman Catholic and, hence, can be considered to be at least nominally so. Non-Christians and non- "main-line" Protestants were dropped from the study.

PROCEDURE

The 25-item version of the Hunt Scale was administered under similar conditions to the two samples. The questionnaires were distributed in class together with another form (the Rokeach Value Survey, reported on elsewhere) with the following instructions: "You have been given what might be called a 'belief survey' in that it asks a series of questions about religious beliefs. With respect to each statement there are three alternatives. Please answer each item by circling that one alternative which *best* describes your position." Students had approximately 35 min to complete the form.

The design of the study permits three types of comparisons: (a) a cross-cultural comparison of Spanish and Canadian Christians, (b) a comparison of Canadian Roman Catholics and Canadian Protestants, and (c) a direct comparison of Spanish and Canadian Roman Catholics should interdenominational differences warrant it. Comparison (a) is undertaken in Part I, and comparisons (b) and (c) are made in Part II. The results of these comparisons are summarized in cross-cultural comparisons, by means of dual scaling and chi-square analyses in the text in Tables 2, 3, and 4; and Canadian interdenominational (Catholic vs. Protestant) comparisons also in the text (Table 5).

PART I

Results

As predicted, significant differences were found between Canadian and Spanish subjects, $\chi^2(2, N = 11481) = 532.16, p < .001$, with the latter far

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TABLE 2
Hunt Scale Responses and Mean Scores by Type, Culture, and Denomination

	Spanish		*Canadian*					
			Catholic		*Protestant*		*Total*	
	No.	*Mean*	*No.*	*Mean*	*No.*	*Mean*	*No.*	*Mean*
Literal	1013	3.19	827	6.66	584	6.48	1411	6.69
Antireligious	2400	9.45	473	3.81	566	6.29	1039	4.85
Symbolic	2828	11.13	1731	13.95	1059	11.13	2790	13.03
Total	6241		3031		2209		5240	
Not available	109	1.7%	69	2.2%	41	1.8%	110	2.0%

more "nontraditional" than their Canadian counterparts. By this we mean that Spaniards were much less likely to select the literal option. As shown in Table 2, they also chose to embrace the antireligious position more often than Canadians (cf. Table 3).

It can be argued that the three positions provided in the Hunt Scale represent a continuum, from antireligious, through symbolic, to literal. With this in mind we employed the technique of "dual-scaling" (Nishisato, 1979) to ascertain (a) the relative position of each item to every other item, (b) the differing position of each item with respect to the two cultures, and (c) the percentage of variance accounted for by that item (Weingarden & Nishisato, 1986). The results of this analysis are contained in Table 3 and form the basis of the item analysis that is to follow.

Cross-Cultural Item Analysis

Items from the Hunt Scale can be seen as tapping five different aspects of religious belief: the Church, specific beliefs, the relation of God to humans, secularism, and the Bible. An understanding of differences between the beliefs of Spaniards and Canadians can be achieved by a description of the differences in those five categories. To this end, statements from the Hunt Scale are rearranged in Table 4, so that items tapping similar beliefs occur together.

The Church. Both groups interpret the role of the Church as having a unique function, quite apart from social agencies, yet more Canadians (73.8%) than Spaniards (60.2%) interpret church attendance symbolically, showing agreement with qualification; one third ($p < .001$) of Spaniards see other social events as more rewarding (an antireligious stance).

Specific beliefs. With respect to the existence of God, one fourth of the Spanish sample assumes an antireligious stance as compared with only 7.4% of the Canadians. Over 40% of Spaniards see God as a projection of man's ideals, as compared with only 27% of Canadians. More Spaniards (33%) than Canadians (18%) reject the existence of "hell." On the other

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TABLE 3
Comparison of Spanish and Canadian Ranking and Categorization of Hunt Scale Items

Spanish		*Canadian*		
Statement	*No.*	*No.*	*Statement*	*Type*
God's grace	18			More antireligious
Divine guidance	12	3	Just society	
Responsible to God	21			
Bible's authority	10			
End of man	13			
Fellowship with God	17	13	End of man	
Bible writers—future	19	10	Bible's authority	
Bible writers inspired	4	4	Bible writers inspired	
Just society	3	15	Bible, legendary	
Creation = myth	24	6	Church attendance	
God, a symbol	22	22	God, a symbol	
Eden = myth	20			
Belief = weakness	11			Less antireligious
God is companion	8			
Church attendance	6	16	Human values	
Hell	14	18	God's grace	
Bible, legendary	15	17	Fellowship w/God	
Belief in God	2			
Jesus raised dead	23	21	Responsible to God	More symbolic
Human values	16	8	God is companion	
Virgin birth	9	25	If Bible unreliable	
God's purpose	7	1	The Church	
		5	Miracles, true	
Miracles, true	5	20	Eden = myth	
If Bible unreliable	25	19	Bible writers see future	
		11	Belief = weakness	
The Church	1	24	Creation = myth	
		12	Divine guidance	Less symbolic
		2	Belief in God	
		14	Hell	
		7	God's purpose	
		23	Jesus raised dead	
		9	Virgin birth	
None			None	Literal

hand, when both literal and symbolic options are combined, over 70% of both Spaniards and Canadians believe in the "Virgin birth." This is surprising on two grounds: (a) that Spaniards are rejecting of most other items of faith, and (b) that the Canadian sample is composed of both Catholics and Protestants.

Quite a large difference exists between Spaniards and Canadians with respect to belief in divine guidance and assistance. More than one half of the Spanish sample rejects the idea of divine guidance, and two thirds do not

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TABLE 4
Chi-Square Comparison of Spanish and Canadian Responses

No.	*Statements*	*Chi-Square*	*Significance Level*
Statements related to specific beliefs			
2.	Belief in God	36.630	$p < .001$
22.	God, only a symbol	8.333	$p < .016$
9.	Virgin birth	31.668	$p < .001$
14.	Belief in Hell	40.189	$p < .001$
12.	Belief in Divine guidance	53.050	$p < .000$
18.	Notion of Grace	63.764	$p < .000$
Statements pertaining to the relation of humans to God			
8.	God, the Great Companion	16.498	$p < .001$
17.	Fellowship with God	33.582	$p < .001$
21.	Responsible to God	37.634	$p < .001$
13.	Made to glorify God	47.735	$p < .000$
16.	Universe indifferent to values	14.762	$p < .001$
Statements related to the Bible			
4.	Secular writers just as inspired	27.882	$p < .001$
19.	Biblical writers foretold future	32.190	$p < .001$
10.	Revelation, man's authority	32.731	$p < .001$
25.	No confidence, if Bible unreliable	16.101	$p < .001$
5.	All miracles, true	14.951	$p < .001$
20.	Fall of man, true	32.335	$p < .000$
23.	Jesus walked on water and so forth	28.243	$p < .001$
24.	Creation, based on myths	13.664	$p < .001$

Note. Degrees of freedom = 2.

believe in the concept of "grace." The majority of Canadians subscribe to these views, opting for either the literal or symbolic choice. Indeed, with respect to these two items, we observe the largest significant differences between the two cultural groups.

Relation of humans to God. Forty percent of Spaniards do not see God as a "companion," and about one half see themselves as "made for fellowship" with God or as responsible to Him. By contrast, only one fourth of the Canadian sample rejects these notions. The belief that "man's end is the glorification of God" also brings out large differences. The majority of the Canadian sample (79.4%) accepts this notion, and only half of the Spanish sample agrees. It would appear that any item that lessens the role of the individual is unacceptable to the Spanish sample. This can be seen clearly in Table 3, where the five items most rejected by the Spanish sample have to do with this theme.

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Secularism. Neither group sees God as critical for building a "just society"; although 15% more Canadians take the symbolic option on that item of the scale (#3). The majority of both groups do not see "belief in God's purpose" as destroying man's sense of social responsibility. Both, however, admit the possibility of belief in God as a sign of weakness. This antireligious view is significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 462) = 462, p < .001$, stronger in Spaniards than in Canadians.

The Bible. Here again we note a tendency on the part of the Spanish sample to gravitate toward the antireligious option. Only half see the "biblical writers" as more inspired than Aristotle or Plato. Less than half (46.1%) cede the same authority to "Holy Scripture" that Canadians do. The only anomalous response is to Item 19, wherein slightly more than one fourth of the Spanish sample attributes to biblical writers the ability to see the future.

Only with respect to the Bible does the Canadian sample exhibit a tendency to spread responses over the three options. This is in contrast to the previously observed inclination toward the symbolic alternative.

Biblical content. When it comes to the content of the Bible, we continue to observe significant differences between the two groups. Both (over 70%) interpret the existence of miracles symbolically, but Spaniards are more rejecting of the notion of the "Garden of Eden" and the "creation myth," whereas Canadians adopt a more literal stance with respect to "Christ walking on the water." As was noted earlier, there is a tendency on the part of Canadians with respect to items related to the Bible to spread responses over the three available options. Perhaps this phenomenon is due to interdenominational differences within the Canadian sample.

Summary

In general, the predominant orientation of both groups is to the symbolic as a qualified acceptance of religious doctrines. However, on most issues, Spanish subjects tend to be less literal and more antireligious than Canadians. The significant differences between the two groups seem to be grounded in this trend. There are certain items, however (see Table 3), where the differences are magnified in items having to do with reliance on self and individual responsibility. Overall, the Spanish sample is significantly less accepting of almost every item of belief than the Canadian sample.

PART II

Results

One might ask to what extent the observed differences between Spaniards and Canadians depend on the fact that the Canadian sample is a mixture of

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both main-line Protestants and Catholics. There is a significant difference, $\chi^2(2, N = 5240) = 85.04, p < .01$, between the Catholic and Protestant samples.

However, when each of the Canadian groups of Protestants and Catholics are compared with the Spanish sample, each is more literal and less antireligious, $\chi^2(2, N = 8450) = 168.86, p < .001$, and $\chi^2(2, N = 9272) = 526.85, p < .001$, respectively. Although Canadian Catholics and Protestants respond differently from one another on the Hunt Scale, they do so in a significantly more "theologically conservative" fashion than the Spaniards.

Cross-Denominational Item Analysis

A comparison of Catholics and Protestants sheds additional light on the cross-cultural contrast. Table 5 contains only those Hunt Scale items wherein significant differences were found between the Catholic and Protestant groups.

The Church. Protestants are more literal than either the Spanish or Canadian Catholics ($p < .02$) in that they are more inclined to separate the role of the Church from social agencies, as in Item 1, Option 1:

> Disagree, because the work of the church is to lead persons to Christ, but the work of the schools is to teach persons the skills needed as citizens.

TABLE 5
Chi-Square: Comparison of Protestant and Catholic Samples

No.	*Statements*	*Chi-Square*	*Significance Level*
1.	Role of the Church	7.782	$p < .02$
14.	Belief in hell	9.971	$p < .04$
18.	Notion of grace	19.390	$p < .009$
12.	Belief in Divine guidance	15.166	$p < .01$
22.	God, only a symbol	11.801	$p < .038$
13.	Humans, made to glorify God	13.424	$p < .02$
17.	Fellowship with God	12.782	$p < .026$
21.	Responsible to God	19.801	$p < .003$
4.	Secular writers just as inspired	15.013	$p < .005$
10.	Revelation, man's authority	16.362	$p < .006$
25.	No confidence, if Bible unreliable	17.198	$p < .004$
20.	Fall of man, true	19.336	$p < .002$
24.	Creation, based on myths	12.209	$p < .057$

Note. Degrees of Freedom = 2.

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This could be an extension of the North American separation of Church and state, although there was little difference between the Catholic and Protestant Canadians in church attendance. Both see that as more important than Spanish Catholics do.

Specific beliefs. As one might have expected, Canadian Protestants are less literal about the Virgin birth than are Canadian Catholics, although that difference was not significant. In fact, 80% of Protestants subscribe to it as either literal or symbolic. The comparable figure for Canadian Catholics is 88.7%. More Protestants than Catholics reject the notion of hell ($p < .04$) but not to the degree that Spaniards do.

Relation of God to humans. On the notion of divine assistance, whether as guidance or grace, twice as many Protestants (41%) reject the notions as Canadian Catholics. However, whereas roughly 30% and 40%, respectively, reject those concepts, the comparable figures for Spaniards are 50% and 60%: The Spaniards are apparently more independent, even of God.

On the item, "fellowship with God," a higher percentage of Protestants (34.4%) than Catholics (16.9%) select the antireligious option, perhaps indicating more stress on the present, which Spaniards emphasize even more with a 50% rejection rate.

The Bible. Twice as many Protestants as Catholics (33.3% in contrast to 16.9%) consider Plato and Aristotle to be as inspired as Moses and Paul. On the other hand, 36.7% of Protestants agree that they would no longer have confidence in the Bible if it were found to be unreliable in part, compared with only 20.9% of Catholics. In this case, the implied limitation of faith is present in both the antireligious and literal options, as can be seen below.

> Agree, since there is now much evidence to indicate inaccuracies in the Bible, we can no longer be bound to teachings which do not fit today's changing world.

> Agree, since we would no longer have any way of knowing which parts of the Bible were true and which were not.

This notion of "an ultimate act of faith," whereby the Bible must be accepted totally or not at all, represents a striking difference between Catholics (Canadian and Spanish) and Protestants.

With respect to content, the results are mixed. Some items are embraced, others rejected. For instance, on the subject of the Garden of Eden, Protestants are more literal ($p < .002$). Yet with the creation myth,

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Protestants are more antireligious, and Catholics almost significantly ($p < .057$) more literal.

Overall, there appears to be a tendency for Canadian Catholics to go for a symbolic interpretation when rejecting the literal option. Canadian Protestants, on the other hand, when faced with the same situation, are significantly more inclined to embrace the antireligious view.

SUMMARY

Overall, a significant difference ($p < .001$) was found between the Spanish and Canadian samples in the "dual scaling analysis" (Table 3), because the Spanish sample responded in an antireligious fashion to 13 of the 25 items on the Hunt Scale. The comparable figure for the Canadian sample was 7. Even when responding symbolically, the general configuration of Spanish responses did not approach a literal orientation. On all items (except 1 and 15), they proved to be more antireligious and further from a literal response than the Canadians.

The general nature of the items rejected reveal an emphasis of Spanish youth. Hunt Scale items 18, 12, 21, 10, and 17 revolve around the theme of placing oneself in God's hands through reliance on God (for help and happiness) and responsibility to Him. These Spanish university students rejected this notion in favor of independence and control of one's own destiny.

When the Canadian sample was broken down into Protestant and Catholic subgroups, both were found to be more literal than the Spaniards. Although the two groups responded differently from one another, they both did so in a more "theologically conservative" way than the Spaniards. Therefore, there were fewer differences between members of the same culture (Canadian) than between members of the same religious (Catholic) denomination.

DISCUSSION

A major issue that must be addressed is the reason for the observed differences—that the Spanish sample was less literal and more antireligious than the Canadians. It was noted in the introduction that Spain is experiencing a period of rapid social change in its economic, social, and political realities. It must appear to Spanish youth that there are no absolutes, in those areas or in religion. Being more sophisticated, they seem to feel free (or compelled) to question or doubt the traditional dogmas of the Church. The data do not, however, fully support this argument. Although more inclined than Canadians to select the antireligious stance,

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they identified themselves as Roman Catholics, rejecting "atheist," "agnostic," and "nonpracticing" options, and accepting (on the Hunt Scale) the role of the Church.

Odd as it might seem, it could be that the absence of religious pluralism accounts for this anomaly because the presence of several religions in a society might bring to the fore a need for orthodoxy if the institution (and its members) is to distinguish itself from others. In this way, any religion in a pluralistic society might experience the same pressures of conformity that act on other groups. In Spain, however, Catholicism as the dominant religion needs to exert little pressure for uniform religious views.

We favor an alternative explanation: that religion has served, and continues to serve, different functions in the two societies. In North America, religion was transplanted from Europe through ethnic minorities, and it performed functions that were not simply religious: preserving ethnic identity, easing acculturation, and providing for educational and healthcare needs. In these functions, a basic emphasis was on their distinctiveness from other religions. The stress on doctrinal differences not only elucidated the differences between denominations, but, by extension, explained socioeconomic, educational, and political differences within society itself. The basic value orientation of North American society therefore came not from religion but from the "North American experience" of limitless potential, an action-orientation, and so on. This resulted not so much in a "civil religion" as some authors suggest (Bellah, 1967; Tanenbaum, 1975), as in a separation of religion from values. Therefore, religious attitudes (Harris & Mills, 1985) and religious affiliation (Northover, 1972b) are more predictable from value than from religious belief.

Bibby (1987) argued that North American society has experienced a high degree of institutional specialization, with the result that religion has lost the ability to integrate (or to give meaning or value to) various aspects of living. Religion, he continued, has become a "consumer object" so that individuals pick and choose between the "fragments" (functions, rites, and beliefs) it offers.

Bibby's argument helps to explain the anomalies of sporadic church attendance, lack of behavior–belief consistency, and so forth. What it does not explain, in terms of this study, is why Canadians of a similar educational level and social class as Spaniards should choose the more theologically conservative fragments. Our answer is that religion is already separated from values. The institutional specialization to which Bibby refers has simply gone a step further and stripped it of functions except religious belief and rites of passage. Therefore, the doctrines sampled by the Hunt Scale continue to be important for North American church-goers who are loath to reject them because they represent what religion is about for them.

By contrast, Spanish Catholicism functions differently because, for centuries, it has not had to compete for followers. Therefore, there is little

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reason to stress doctrinal differences. Although it serves some of the same nonreligious functions as the early American churches, it does this without rivals. "Distinctiveness" is not essential to its identity. The Spanish Church, therefore, provides a religious backdrop for the value orientation of its society, prescribing the "valued personality type," accepted family orientation, and the way individuals should relate to God. It has also been a political force within Spanish society. Whereas a changed social system might lessen its political strength, and institutional specialization loosen its grip on education and healthcare, its role as custodian of values remains unchallenged.

Whereas Spanish university students might reject many religious doctrines that North Americans deem important, they might not reject the Spanish Church's principle focus on values. Further cross-cultural comparisons of religious belief should therefore include an examination of such differing value systems to explore relations between religious beliefs and cultural or individual values. This would not only elucidate the relation between culture and religion but also clarify the suggested primacy of values over beliefs (Northover, 1972b; Rokeach, 1970).

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